Application of Effective Techniques in Teaching/Learning English

Shweta Arora[1], Kavita A. Joshi[1], Sonymol Koshy[2] & Deeksha Tewari[3]

[1] Department of Professional Communication, Graphic Era Hill University, Bhimtal, Uttarakhand,India

[2] School of Computing, Graphic Era Hill University, Bhimtal, Uttarakhand, India

[3] School of Management, Graphic Era Hill University, Bhimtal, Uttarakhand, India

Correspondence: Dr. Shweta Arora, HOD Dept of PC, Graphic Era Hill University, Bhimtal, Uttarakhand, 263153, India. Tel: 011-91-9760222488. E-mail: dr.shwetarora@gmail.com

Abstract

English being a global language has become a vital element in all walks of life. The feelers of this language have left no sphere unmarked with its significance. Despite such a colossal tide for gaining command over the language it was found that the conventional pattern of teaching English language could not reap desired results. A comprehensive and analytical study of the aforesaid problem stirred researchers to work in this area. In order to enhance the communication skills of native speakers, practical implications were incorporated to theoretical principles of English Language teaching/learning. The present paper discusses the application and results of the experimental procedure of the effective techniques employed in English teaching/learning. The various techniques used in the modus operandi of enhancing the communication skills of the students were small talk conversations, SWOT analysis, phonetics, avoiding Indianism, vocabulary building through mnemonics and root words, describing and narrating visual stimulus, listening to important speeches followed by comprehension, sharing reviews after watching motivational videos/movies, peer learning and delivering effective presentations. The learning outcomes of the aforesaid activities included better reasoning, enhanced thought process, ability to concoct innovative ideas, command over language, improved communication skills, fluency etc.

Keywords: analysis, assessment, comprehensive, cumulative, facilitator, learning, observation, participatory

1. Introduction

English is a global language. With the advent of global shrink, there is a demand of good command over this language. In addition to the technical or domain specific knowledge, the proficiency in English as a language has become indispensible. Unfortunately for the native learners, English is a second language and it was found that the students in large numbers failed to express their views and ideas in English in both general and specific terms. This hindered their performance and growth in the modern era. Probing into the issue, the following problems were identified.

1.1 Problems

1.1.1 It was found that the conventional pattern of teaching English was just producing rote learners or mug pots. This pattern appeared obsolete for the pragmatic usage of the language.

1.1.2 No qualitative assessment of students was planned as per the old pattern.

1.1.3 The old method was based on stereotypical English grammar study (the same concepts like parts of speech, tenses, subject verb agreement, conditionals etc. with no practical implications.

1.1.4 The teaching approach was teacher centered which led to a one way process which lacked interesting interaction and therefore demanded a change. It required a shift from 'teacher centered to learner centered'.

The existing problem was analyzed and it was found that that there was a need to overhaul the conventional teaching methodology. Realizing the need of the hour, laboratory classes were introduced in the syllabi in order to bridge the gap between the teacher and the learner. This paper aims to discuss the application and results of this experimental procedure of effective techniques that were employed in teaching English in the Professional Communication Laboratory classes. To improve the communication skills of the students, we incorporated practical implications to theoretical principles of Professional Communication.

2. Research Methodology

An empirical study with sampling method was employed with the following details:

Sample size: 30 students

Educational Background: B.Tech First Year (CSE, ECE, ME and CE Departments respectively).

We were concerned about making the entire class involved in speaking English through interactive activities therefore we divided a class of sixty students into two batches G1 and G2.

2.1 Objectives

1.1.1 To identify the internal barriers that hinder communication in English.

1.1.2 To identify the common grammatical mistakes in the usage of English Language.

1.1.3 To identify the commonly mispronounced words due to Mother Tongue Influence.

1.1.4 To alleviate the aforesaid diagnosed problems by participatory drills and modern learning techniques.

2.2 Research Design

This was an empirical study which included cumulative comprehensive observation and evaluation as an assessment tool. The research design included:

2.2.1 Diagnosis of the Problem

2.2.2 Planning Activities

2.2.3 Execution

2.2.4 Analysis

2.2.5 Feedback

3. Action Plan

Certain practically applicable methods were employed to achieve our primary goal. We made use of technical gadgets like projector, speakers, laptop and language lab software etc. Practical methods were used to carry out conversation between two or more students through peer learning via role plays, skits, group discussions, mock interviews, impromptu, extempore etc. Some methods are discussed below:

3.1 Small Talk Conversations

According to Klaus Schneider "such a conversation consists of a number of fairly predictable segments, or "moves". The first move is usually phrased so that it is easy for the other person to agree. It may be either a question, or a statement of opinion with a tag question. For example, an opening line such as "Lovely weather, isn't it?" is a clear invitation for agreement. The second move is the other person's response. In functional conversations that address a particular topic." Grice's Maxim of Quantity suggests that "responses should contain no more information than was explicitly asked for." On the basis of various theories the instructor planned small talk sessions for the students and demonstrated the meaning of small talk through videos, presentations and theories given by eminent researchers.

The facilitator/instructor then divided each batch G1 and G2 into groups of four. The students were then asked to enact a situation depicting a small talk and make a ten minute video. The video could be recorded anywhere in the university campus - the cafeteria, classroom, seminar hall, conference room etc. that suited the situation for the small talk. Participation of each member of the group with appropriate dialogues was mandatory. This dramatic method made them practice the situation until the state of perfection. Students easily adapted themselves as characters of the small talk. For instance, some groups opted direct topics such as health, looks etc. while others opted indirect topics referring to a situational context such as current affairs like demonetization, surgical strike, various campaigns like "*Swatch Bharat Abhiyan*", "*Beti Bachao Beti Parao*", weather, elections, exit poll, sports etc.

The video recorded by each group was then shown to the entire batch G1/G2. The narrator of each group introduced the scene and theme of small talk before demonstrating the video. A projector and screen was employed to showcase this activity. Evaluation was done on the basis of content, body language, acting, grammar, fluency and pronunciation etc. Feedback was given to each group for improvement.

This method helped the students to analyze a situation, develop their communication skills and enhance creativity through acting, giving response to questions and thinking in accordance with the new situation. This activity acquainted the students to the technique of small talk- 'an ice breaker' to initiate conversations. The

students learnt to introduce themselves, give information, messages and describe events using Present Tense, Past Tense and Future Tense.

3.2 SWOT Analysis followed by Self Introduction

SWOT Analysis is generally being used "for business planning, strategic planning, competitor evaluation, marketing, business and product development and research reports."After comprehending the concept of SWOT analysis, we incorporated this technique as a personality litmus test for the students.

Students were acquainted with the acronym SWOT (Strengths, **W**eaknesses, **O**pportunities and **T**hreats). They were asked to introspect their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats and write them down on a piece of paper in the following format for example:

Table 1. SWOT analysis

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
1. Confident	1. Stage fear
2. Passionate	2. Fickle minded
3. Meticulous	3. Poor communication
4. ……………………	4. ……………………
5. ……………………	5. ……………………
6. ……………………	6. ……………………
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
1. Job	1. Failures
2. Education	2. Sustaining achievements
3. Entrepreneurship	3. Meeting expectations
4. ……………………	4. ……………………
5. ……………………	5. ……………………
6. ……………………	6. ……………………

The facilitator then asked the students to examine their analysis and come up with a remedial action plan for their weaknesses and threats. A sample remedial action plan is demonstrated below:

Table 2. Remedial Action Plan

WEAKNESSES	REMEDIAL ACTION
1. Stage fear	1. For stage fear: Mirror Exercise
2. Fickle minded	2. For Fickle Minded: Meditation and breathing techniques, brainstorming
3. Poor communication	3. For poor communication: Tongue twisters, reading short stories, practice dialogue delivery through role plays
4. ……………………	4. ……………………………………..
5. ……………………	5. …………………………………….
6. ……………………	6. …………………………………….

THREATS	REMEDIAL ACTION
1. Failures	1. For Failures and meeting expectations (1 & 3): Live in the present moment and not to be anxious about the future.
2. Sustaining achievements	
3. Meeting expectations	2. For sustaining achievements: be consistent in your approach.
4. ………………………	
5. ………………………	3. Common Remedy for 1 &3
6. ………………………	4……………………………….
	5………………………………..
	6………………………………..

The facilitator then helped the students to chalk out an effective weekly plan to overcome their barriers. A follow up session was done by the facilitator to keep track of the improvement in the weaknesses and threats of the students. This was followed by a Cumulative-Comprehensive- Assessment of the students' personality.

To evaluate the effectiveness of this technique, the same procedure was repeated with the same group (sample) and it was found that the weaknesses and threats were less in number. Thus this technique served prolific learning outcomes and acted as a gateway to overcome their barriers.

The students were then asked to fill in the profiling document (provided by the facilitator) on the basis of SWOT analysis done by them. A sample layout of student profile sheet is given below:

INTRODUCTION

Good Morning/ Evening Sir/Madam,

1. My name is / I am ....

2. I belong to / I come from …………………………………………….

3. I am pursuing………………in   ....from Graphic Era Hill University, Bhimtal.

4. I have completed Intermediate from …………..…(school name)……………..with ....% and High School from .... (School Name) with ....%. .

5. My father is a/an .... and my mother is a /an……………. (Mention extraordinary awards or honors received by your parent, if any)

6. I have ....siblings. (Mention extraordinary awards or honors received by your siblings, if any)

7. My aim is/ I aspire to become a successful ……………………………. (Entrepreneur / Engineer /…………)

8. I am inspired by /My role model is …………………………… (elaborate by giving the reasons)

ABOUT MY ACHIEVEMENTS:

9. At school level I participated in ……………… activities and stood (First/Second /Third) (Mention extracurricular
    activities) ……………………………………………………………………………………………………
    ………

10. In college I participated in (mention extracurricular activities)
    ………
    ………

11. My strengths are (You may also choose the traits that suit your personality)

    I am passionate and dedicated towards my work.

    I am enthusiastic

    I have good co-ordination skills

    I possess strong analytical skills

    I have good entrepreneurial skills

I have consistently met my deadlines and targets

I am a good team player/ leader

12. I have attended ……………..workshops/ Seminars/ Industrial visits/ internship etc. (elaborate)

……

……

13. I have gathered great experience while performing the task given to me in industrial training/workshop/seminar/internship etc.

14. Elaborate   what   you gained …………………………………………………………………………………………………

……

………………………………………………………………………………………

15. I have done …………. Massive Open Online Courses/ any other online courses in…………………..(Mention relevant courses)

16. Elaborate what you gained

……

……

…………

17. My   hobbies are …………………………………………………………………………………………………

……

18. My future goals are to (you may mention your objectives and plans)

……

……

…………………………………………………………..

Figure 1. Student profile sheet

Guidelines were given by the facilitator for filling in the profiling sheet. Correction of the students' profile sheet was done. The students were then asked to record their profile as an introductory video of two minutes (phase 1). The students submitted the self introductory video to the facilitator. The facilitator diagnosed the area of improvement and gave relevant feedback to the students. The best five self introductory videos were shown to the entire group. The students were then asked to rectify their flaws and prepare the self introductory video (phase 2). In the rectified videos, it was found that the students had surmounted their internal barriers to a large extent.

3.3 Use of Correct Pronunciation

There are 44 sounds in phonetics-12 pure vowels, 8 diphthongs' and 24 consonants. Students of Uttarakhand state in India have Kumauni and Garwali accent (MTI). They face difficulty in the articulation of certain English consonant sounds like sh (ʃ), w, v etc. Words like ship /ʃɪp/ is generally mispronounced as **s**ip/sip/, pleasure/ pleʒə(r) / as pleajure /pleʤə/, career/ kəˈrɪə(r)/ as **cay**-rier /kæriə(r)/, world /wɜːld/ as **bh-r**-/ld/, white /ˈwaɪt/ as **bh**-/aɪt/, video /ˈvɪdɪəʊ/ as **bhi**-/ dɪəʊ/, boiling /ˈbɔɪlɪŋ/ as **bh**- /ɔɪlɪŋ/, etc.

Students with such regional accent were identified. Interactive activity based modules like games; presentations etc. were introduced in the classroom as a remedy to the existing problem. A thorough session on IPA symbols, phonemes, allophones, syllables, stress and intonation was given to the students. Articulation drill-tongue twisters was utilized to identify the difference in the articulation of allophones like s and sh, p and ph, t and th etc. The mispronounced sounds were identified and rectified by the facilitators. The exercise module on phonetics through the Language lab software was also employed. The students recorded words and sentences in their voice and compared the recorded words with the original pronunciation. Regular practice of listening and correct articulation helped the regional students in overcoming the commonly mispronounced consonants and yielded positive outcomes.

3.4 Listening to Important Speeches Followed by Comprehension

It was analyzed that listening plays a vital role in comprehending linguistic skills. Therefore, traits of a good

listener were introduced to the learners. Active listening was reinforced by means of audios and videos like speech of Ben Kingsley in Gandhi, Russell Crowe in Gladiator, important speeches delivered by Ratan Tata-former Chairman of Tata Sons, Kumar Mangalam- Chairman of Aditya Birla Group, Rahul Bajaj- Chairman and MD of Bajaj Auto etc. Students were then asked to pen down in a structured manner what they understood from the speeches. Listening to important speeches / motivational talks was followed by brainstorming sessions. Questions based on listening comprehension were asked.

The English Language Software also proved useful in carrying out this activity. The learners listened to important conversations and answered the questions that followed. The facilitator examined the level of interest in the students during the activity.

3.5 Avoiding Indianism in Spoken English

Students generally utilize literal translation method in expressing their views and ideas in English. This results into incorrect sentence construction that often causes miscommunication in the International market; therefore, needed to be rectified. The following were the most common errors made by the regional students:

Table 3. Indianism in English

S.No	Incorrect	Correct
1	"Are you having a pen?"	"Do you have a pen?"
2	"What is your good name?"	"What is your name?"
3	"Myself Sumit Tewari."	"I am Sumit Tewari"/ "My name is Sumit Tewari."
4	"My cousin brother arrived from Almora."	"My cousin arrived from Almora."
5	"Please reply back as soon as possible."	"Please reply as soon as possible."
6	"Communication classes are interesting, no?"	"Communication classes are interesting, aren't they?"
7	"Amit is out of station."	"Amit is out of town"

Attention was given to the regional students so that they could become confident in speaking flawless English.

3.6 Vocabulary Building through Mnemonics and Root Words

Vocabulary is emerging as one of the most important sections of various competitive exams. And good vocabulary is important to get a high score in the written test as well as verbal communication. It was observed that students were not able to express their views because of paucity of word power. The traditional vocabulary boaster methods like vocabulary quizzes, flash cards, Sudoku etc. seemed to be futile because the students crammed the words and their meanings but failed to retain them for long. Hence the usage of the words was not seen among the students. As a counteractive phenomenon, the facilitators switched over to mnemonics. The facilitator gave a set of 25 words with mnemonics, which was followed by a classroom activity to test the retention and usage. The following methodology was followed:

Subjugate with the mnemonic "*sub-jhuk- gye- gate- per*" (in Hindi) helped the students to infer the meaning of the word as defeat or suppression. Duress with the mnemonic "*dar*" (in Hindi) helps to retain the meaning threat. It was found that mnemonics acted as a catalyst in retention and usage of higher level vocabulary for native learners (Indian). Students exhibited satisfactory learning behavior resulting into successful learning outcomes.

The facilitator also employed the Root-Word technique for vocabulary enhancement. For instance the facilitator made the students identify the roots of words. For instance the words like amity, amiable, amicable, amicus have a common prefix i.e. ami. Ami as a root means friendly. Therefore, the meaning of Amity is friendly, Amiable means friendly or lovable, Amicable means friendly or cordial and Amicus is an advisor to the court or a friend of the court.Similarly, words like ambidextrous, ambiguous, ambivalent and ambivert have a common prefix ambi. Ambi as root means both. Therefore the meaning of ambidextrous is able to use both hands equally, ambiguous means open to two interpretations, ambivalent stands for mixed feelings and ambivert means to have both introvert and extrovert personality traits. This interactive exercise was interesting and helped students enhance their retention power by simply identifying the roots of the words. The students found that this technique was easier than the traditional rote learning.

3.7 Describing and Narrating Visual Stimuli/ extempore

The objective of this activity was to enhance the communication skills of the students and help the students

speak spontaneously on a given topic. The activity, visual stimulus was assessed through brainstorming by asking the students to peep outside the window or observe an object inside the classroom and describe the object(s) they visualized. Students described objects like fan, electric bulb, passerby, trees, sky etc and correlated these objects technically thus supported their content with scientific details. Along with the assessment of their thought process, usage of adequate grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary of each student was also assessed.

Picture reading exercise was also incorporated in this activity which was followed by narration. Grammatical errors were identified and fixed. This exercise proved to be a participatory tool for enhancing command over English Language.

3.8 Watching Motivational Movies and Videos (Sharing Reviews)

The facilitator arranged sessions on motivational movies and videos and asked the learners to write the review of each movie/video they saw in three paragraphs-introductory, body and conclusion. A brief session on unity, coherence and emphasis was given so that the students could pen down their thoughts in an organized manner. The review writing was followed by narration. Charul Jain has rightly pointed out, "We share with our family the summary of the movie that we saw or the party that we attended; we share with our friends the highlights of the cricket match or a stage performance they missed; and we share with our friends the central idea of a lecture that we heard. Summarizing is done inadvertently all the time." Through this activity it is reiterated that summarizing is an integral part of language learning.

3.9 Peer Learning

Patrick deWitt has unfolded peer learning as an important modus operandi as a self grooming exercise. He has rightly pointed out in a quote, "I don't want to be taught lessons, and I don't want to be spoken down to. I want to be treated as a peer and to be made to feel welcome." Hence the instructor planned out role plays as a participatory learning activity for the learners.

Thus role plays were assigned to the students and they were asked to apply aspects and rules of grammar while enacting the given situation. The objective was to inculcate correct articulation through relevant dialogue delivery.

The instructor divided each group G1 and G2 into subgroups of five members each and assigned them with a wide range of situations like 'Handling Problems', 'Handling Complaints' 'Helping Hands' etc. Each group downloaded and collected interesting videos on the given theme and explored different situations. After an intensive study of the researched material, each group weaved an original skit. The enacted videos were recorded and submitted to the instructor for evaluation. After the evaluation, the best five videos were shown to the class. This activity helped learners to explore a particular idea from different angles. It helped in building confidence, team work, discipline, and punctuality.

3.10 Delivering Presentation

Effective communication demands unhindered delivery of the conceived idea. The art of effective presentation helps in meeting the above objective. Thereby the facilitator introduced the rudimentary concept of presentation and the role of body language. They were shown videos on positive and negative body postures and gestures. This was followed by presentations on various topics. Special emphasis was given to the introduction of the student. The presentation delivered was recorded and feedback was given to the students so that they could improve on their grey areas.

4. Evaluation as a Tool to Measure the Effectiveness of Various Techniques

Evaluation of communication skills was based on one-on-one interaction with the students in Mid-Term and End-Term Laboratory Exam. As per BOS (Board of Studies of Graphic Era Hill University-2015-16) the students were assessed out of 30 marks in the Mid Term Examination and 50 marks in the End Term Examination.

Table 4. Evaluation criteria

The evaluation criteria for Mid Term exam was as follows:		
Total: 30 marks		
Content/Clarity: 10 marks	Fluency and Pronunciation: 10 marks	Kinesics: 10 marks
The evaluation criteria for End Term exam was as follows:		
Total: 50 marks		
Pronunciation: 10 marks	Body Language: 10 marks	Confidence: 10 marks
Content: 10 marks	Clarity of Thought: 10 marks	

In the evaluation process, the researcher examined the perception of the students through informal unstructured interview questions. The overall personality of the student was assessed and evaluated.

5. Data Analysis

For data analysis, a sample size of 30 students was collected before and after implementation of the aforesaid techniques. Further they were categorized as high, medium and low. A comparative study of pre and post implementation of the practical techniques was done. The results of the analysis are discussed in the findings.

Table 5. Pre implementation scores

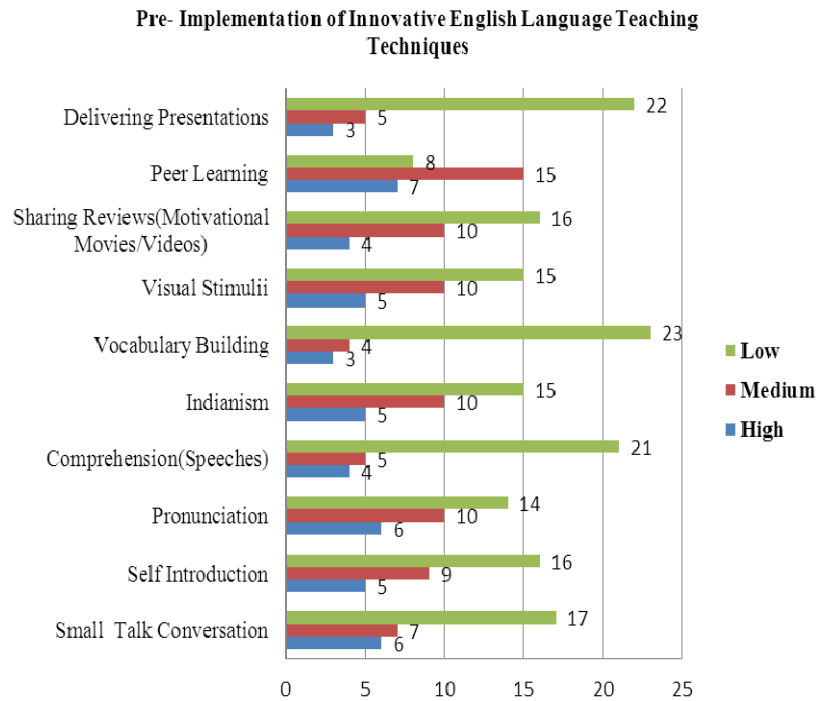| S.No	Teaching Technique	High	Medium	Low
1	Small Talk Conversation	6	7	17
2	Self Introduction	5	9	16
3	Pronunciation	6	10	14
4	Comprehension(Speeches)	4	5	21
5	Indianism	5	10	15
6	Vocabulary Building	3	4	23
7	Visual Stimulii	5	10	15
8	Sharing Reviews(Motivational Movies/Videos)	4	10	16
9	Peer Learning	7	15	8
10	Delivering Presentations	3	5	22

Figure 2. Graphical representation of pre implementation scores

Table 6. Post implementation scores

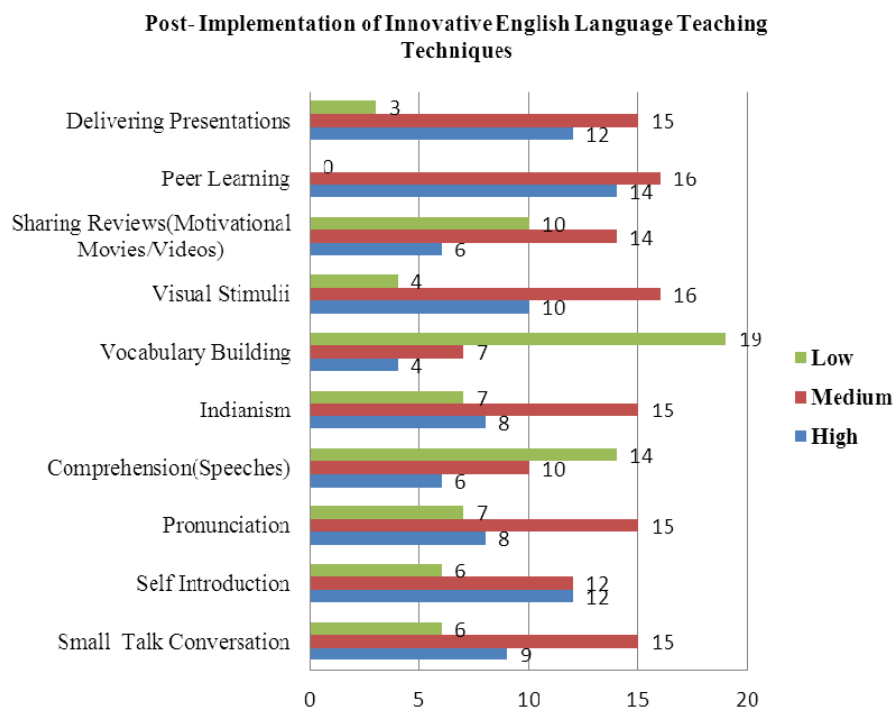| S.No	Teaching Technique	High	Medium	Low
1	Small Talk Conversation	9	15	6
2	Self Introduction	12	12	6
3	Pronunciation	8	15	7
4	Comprehension(Speeches)	6	10	14
5	Indianism	8	15	7
6	Vocabulary Building	4	7	19
7	Visual Stimuli	10	16	4
8	Sharing Reviews(Motivational Movies/Videos)	6	14	10
9	Peer Learning	14	16	0
10	Delivering Presentations	12	15	3

Figure 3. Graphical representation of post implementation scores

6. Findings

On the basis of cumulative comprehensive observation and evaluation, it was found that the use of various techniques employed in English teaching/learning generated interest in the learners and increased their involvement in various activities. Table 7 clearly shows the difference between Pre and Post implementation of the English Language teaching techniques. The positive values depict the increase in the percentage of students falling in the category (High, Medium and Low). The negative values show a decline in the percentage of students falling in the category (High, Medium and Low). It was observed that after the implementation of the techniques, there is a decline in the students falling in the low category.

Table 7. Difference in pre-post implementation results

| S.No	Teaching Technique	High	Medium	Low
1	Small Talk Conversation	10.00	26.67	-36.67
2	Self Introduction	23.33	10.00	-33.33
3	Pronunciation	13.33	6.67	-20.00
4	Comprehension(Speeches)	6.67	16.67	-23.33
5	Indianism	10.00	16.67	-26.67
6	Vocabulary Building	3.33	10.00	-13.33
7	Visual Stimuli	16.67	20.00	-36.67
8	Sharing Reviews(Motivational Movies/Videos)	6.67	13.33	-20.00
9	Peer Learning	23.33	3.33	-26.67
10	Delivering Presentations	30.00	33.33	-63.33
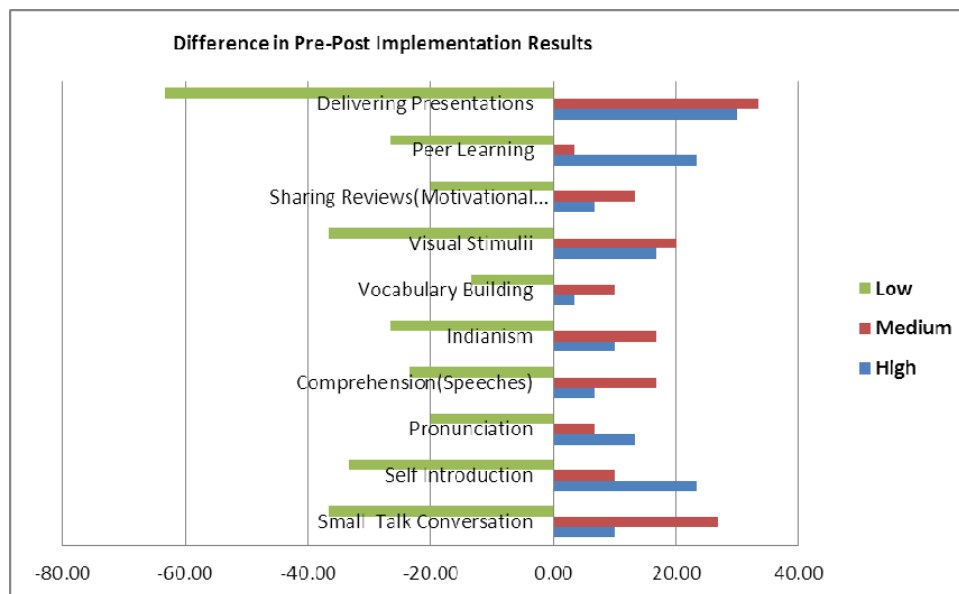
Figure 4. Graphical representation of the difference in pre-post implementation results

The techniques that resulted in marked improvement were Delivering Presentations, Visual Stimuli and Self Introduction. The techniques that showed lower improvement levels were Pronunciation Sharing Reviews (Motivational Movies/Videos) and Vocabulary Building. This is probably because of the dependency of these techniques on the Mother Tongue Influence and poor reading habits.

Based on evaluation as a tool to measure the performance of the students it was concluded that the learners exhibited confidence and they were able to maintain appropriate body language in group discussions and mock interviews. They could frame correct sentences and debate on various issues. Their pronunciation and voice modulation was also apt to a certain extent. The key learning through various activities included better reasoning, enhanced thought process, improved creativity, ability to concoct innovative ideas, command over language, improved communication skills, fluency etc. The outcome was reflected in their writing tasks as well.

References

Bhatia, R. C. (2012). *Business Communication*. India: Ane Books Pvt. Ltd.

Ganachari, U. S. (2016). ELT: Status and Challenges at Under Graduate Level in Rural north Karnataka. *The Journal of English language Teaching, 58*(4).

Grice, H. P. (1975). Logic and Conversation. In P. Cole, & J. Morgan (Eds.), *Syntax and Semantics: Speech Acts*, Vol.3, Academic, NY.

Jain, C. (2016). Teaching Academic Writing: Summarizing. *The Journal of English language Teaching (India)*, *58*(1).

Raman , M., & Sharma, S. (2004). *Technical Communication: Principles and Practice*. India: Oxford University Press.

Schneider, K. (1988). *Small Talk: Analysing Phatic Discourse*, PhD thesis, Philipps-Universität, Marburg, W. Germany.

Wren & Martin. (2012). *High School English Grammar and Composition*. India: S.Chand and Company Ltd. Retrieved from http://www.businessballs.com

Copyrights